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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9463  
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RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2274  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5736  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 9340  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6924  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 2330  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2709  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000629

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO  
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/14/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: SOME POLITICAL PRISONERS RELEASED IN  
AMNESTY

REF: A. RANGOON 116

[1](#)B. RANGOON 752

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Classified By: Political Officer Marc Shaw for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

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[1](#)1. (C) State-run radio and television announced late September 17 that the government would release 7,114 prisoners for good behavior and humanitarian reasons. Prisoners are being released progressively; Embassy sources believe up to 250 political prisoners may be among the total. Thus far we have confirmed the amnesty includes at least two journalists, several former National League for Democracy (NLD) MPs, some former Military Intelligence officers, an elderly Buddhist monk, a prominent businesswoman, and former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt's astrologer. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) State-run media announced September 17 that the government would release 7,114 prisoners for good behavior and out of consideration to their families. The September 18 edition of the government-controlled New Light of Myanmar (NLM) newspaper followed that the regime is releasing prisoners to "turn them into citizens to be able to participate in building a new nation." Correctional Department Director General Zaw Win echoed regime sentiments in a news conference the afternoon of September 18, saying that the release comes on the 21st anniversary of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) -- now called the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) -- assuming power. Zaw Win said the move would enable those released to take part in elections planned for 2010. Over the past 21 years the regime has released approximately 120,000 prisoners, Zaw Win reportedly added.

[1](#)3. (C) Embassy sources speculate that up to 250 political prisoners may be among those released. (Note: The government continues to deny it holds political prisoners. It maintains all prisoners are citizens who broke the law. End note.) When pressed by journalists, Zaw Win intimated the release would include up to 250 prisoners detained under the various laws usually used to convict political prisoners.

¶4. (SBU) We have confirmed with Embassy sources the following high-profile prisoners have been or are expected to be released:

-- Win Htain (former private secretary to Aung San Suu Kyi): He was released from Katha prison after serving 14 years on September 23, 2008, but was rearrested after just 17 hours for giving an interview to the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB).

-- Saw Naing Naing (former Pazundaung Township NLD chairman and NLD MP for Pazundaung): Arrested in 1990, released in 1999, and re-arrested in September 2000.

-- Monywa Aung Shin (former NLD Sagaing Division Vice-Chairman and well-known poet); arrested in 2000.

-- Eint Khaing Oo and Kyaw Kyaw Than (journalists with Ecovision Journal and Weekly Eleven, respectively): Held since 2008 for reporting on Nargis victims who were marching to UNDP offices in Rangoon.

-- Bodaw Thant Hla (astrologer): Detained in 2003 or 2004 following the purge of Khin Nyunt; he was reportedly Khin Nyunt's personal astrologer.

-- Win Myint (democracy activist): Arrested in 1988. (Note: When journalists asked him upon his release if he is an NLD member, he pointed out he has been in jail since before the NLD was formed. End note.)

-- Kyi Kyi San (prominent businesswoman): No further

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information.

Comment

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¶5. (C) As with past amnesties, prisoners are being released gradually and it will take several days to determine just how many political detainees have been released. In February of 2009, the SPDC released 6313 prisoners including approximately 19 political prisoners (Ref A); in September 2008, the SPDC released 9,002 prisoners including approximately a dozen political prisoners, notably NLD CEC members Win Tin and Khin Maung Swe (Ref B).

¶6. (C) As in the past, we suspect the timing on the release was deliberate; it coincides with the final stages of the USG's policy review on Burma and with PM Thein Sein's and FM Nyan Win's planned attendance at UNGA. The number 7,114 presumably was chosen for numerological significance. Eleven is reportedly one of Senior General Than Shwe's lucky numbers. Seven plus four and the eleven in between would appear a winning combination.  
DINGER